The Attraction and Retention of Lower-Level Maquiladora Workers

Melissa Najera, University of Houston-Clear Lake

ABSTRACT

The attraction and retention of quality employees is an integral part of organizational human resources efforts and has been linked to organizational success. As companies begin increasingly realizing that human resources is one of their most important assets, the role of recruitment and retention in human resources management (HRM) needs to be in line with the firm’s strategy formulation in identifying the people-related issues the organization encounters. The importance of recruitment and retention of employees applies not only to domestic organizations but to international companies as well. In maquiladoras in Mexico, the turnover rate has been historically high with some maquiladoras quoting figures in double digits for the month. The key may lie in effectively attracting the workers and keeping that attraction high to minimize turnover. An exploratory study using one-on-one interviews with maquiladora workers was utilized to gather critical information in order for organizations to effectively attract and retain the lower-level maquiladora workers.

INTRODUCTION

In the international scope, attraction and retention issues have plagued multinational organizations. Managers, recruiters, and academicians should not make assumptions regarding worker’s thoughts and beliefs in reference to their attraction and retention to an organization. A more thorough analysis must first be made and then an arrangement of suitable rewards should be developed that comply with the needs. For instance, offering more pay, flexible hours, and fitness programs may be successful in the United States in attracting individuals or bringing turnover rates down, but how important will these inducements be in another culture?

MEXICO AND MAQUILADORAS

As a major partner in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its growth of the maquiladora industry, Mexico has been an “attractive” location for multinational firms. Due to the growth of multinational corporations (MNCs) located in Mexico and the limited research especially in the area of HRM, innovative research in Mexico provides an opportunity to serve as a viable contribution to both academics as well as practitioners. In the following sections, an introduction to the maquiladora industry, followed by a review of the HRM literature specific to maquiladoras will be discussed.

THE MAQUILADORA INDUSTRY

Mexico’s establishment of maquiladoras was mainly to promote foreign investment and jobs in the poverty-stricken country. Maquiladoras (or “maquilas”) have become the main approach of merging Mexico’s economy with the economy of the rest of the world (Kopinak, 1996; Carrillo & Contreras, 1993). Since their introduction into Mexico, the maquiladoras had maintained high growth rates until the year 2001. However, despite the increasing lay-offs and plant closures, many maquiladora manufacturers are beginning to show positive sales numbers indicating that the situation is improving (Maquila Portal, 2007a; Fullerton & Barraza de Anda (2003). Large multinational corporations like Whirlpool, Volkswagon, and Wal-Mart are even expanding their current operations in Mexico (Maquila Portal, 2007b, 2007c).
Currently there are approximately 2,800 maquiladora plants employing over 1,191,250 people in Mexico (Maquila Portal, 2007d). As a result, companies will seek to hire workers again. This action indicates the increasing concern about employment equity and cultural equality, especially in the functions maintained by the human resource department regarding attraction and retention issues (Cattaneo, Reavley, & Templer, 1994).

**HRM RESEARCH IN MAQUILADORAS**

Regarding HR topics, the research has been minimal but major advances have been made. Contributing to the literature, Teagarden, Butler, and Von Glinow (1992) introduced the HRM challenges in relation to maquiladora workers employed in Mexico. Some key issues discussed were the following: young and inexperienced workers, cross-culture elements, Mexico’s labor law, and coping with collectivist attitudes by workers. Teagarden, et al., (1992) also gave prescriptions toward specific HR activities (recruitment, selection, training, compensation, and performance appraisal) in managing Mexican maquiladora employees. Respectfully, Martinez and Ricks (1989) did perform some empirical work related to the degree of influence U.S. multinational firms have over their Mexican counterparts’ HRM decision; however, no mention of specific HR activities were stated. With the implementation of NAFTA, new challenges were introduced to the already problematical HRM situation in Mexico. However, several studies rose up to the challenge to broaden the existing IHRM literature. Paik and Teagarden (1995) specifically investigated the Mexican maquiladora industry in regards to different approaches in international human resource management (IHRM). Their comparison of HR procedures in Japanese, Korean, and US maquiladoras in Mexico showed that US MNEs were in a “better competitive” position due to their familiarity and acknowledgement of differences between their country and Mexico. A key reason was based on more training and development given to both US and Mexican managers by US firms.

**RETENTION IN MAQUILADORAS**

INEGI (2007) indicates the reasons Mexican employees have left their employment. While 38.8% of Mexico’s unemployed population have left their jobs due to lay-offs, it is interesting to note that 39.6% stated job dissatisfaction as the reason for leaving their employment. However, we cannot generalize this reason to the maquiladora industry since this statistic encompasses all unemployed workers. Nevertheless, the reason why workers have left and the issue of turnover have surfaced as one of the major problems that confront maquiladora management (Thyfault, 1987; Tello & Greene, 1996; Presley, 1997; Miller, Hom, & Gomez-Mejia, 2001). Maquiladoras have estimated to lose $62 million a year due to employee turnover. Recruiting and training costs total to about $22 million and $40 million are due to the productivity loss (Maquila Portal, 2000a). In addition, monthly turnover rates had increased from single digits to 15%, depending on the area (Maquila Portal, 2000b, 2000c). Due to the significant cost associated with turnover, academicians have focused their research on turnover in maquiladoras, reasons for leaving and methods in retaining employees.

**TURNOVER LITERATURE**

Turnover literature focusing entirely in Mexico began in the mid-1980s. Lucker and Alvarez (1985) conducted a study using maquiladora women to investigate personality and demographic characteristics in relation to turnover and longevity. Based on this longitudinal study, Lucker and Alvarez (1985) were able to classify 82.1% of the “continuers” and 37 % of the “quitters”. Therefore they recommended that questionnaires or pre-employment tests could be used as effective predictors of worker longevity. Interestingly they did mention, “There will always be environmental manipulations (i.e. inducements) that can be used to induce workers to stay,” but that it makes better sense to hire individuals that are more likely to be “continuers” (Lucker & Alvarez, 1985, p. 7). Thus the importance of inducements has been mentioned in early Mexican turnover literature but not specifically investigated. Another article, Thyfault (1987), investigated four problem areas associated with maquiladoras, including turnover. Her research was based on interviews with four maquiladora managers. No causes of turnover were mentioned, but that incentives are used to
prevent workers from leaving. Incentives cited included cafeterias, food subsidies, food baskets, and pension plans. Nevertheless, since “everyone is providing them” (as one manager mentioned), turnover still exists (Thyfault, 1987, p. 31). In the 1990s, Noll (1990) analyzed the attitude towards work of maquiladora workers. She briefly mentioned causes of turnover being scarcity of labor, compensation packages that are similar among companies, and the housing shortage. Another study, Ochoa (1990) conducted a study looking at the relationship between applicant’s biographical characteristics and their records of turnover and absenteeism. He stated the determinants of turnover being pay, ingratiation with company and coworkers, instrumental and formal communications, centralization, satisfaction, levels of opportunities, perception of equity and employee’s intent. In Noll (1990) and Ochoa (1990), the notion of inducements mentioned, but not analyzed.

In another study, Huerta (1993) tested determinants of turnover for workers in the maquiladora industry in order to identify specific indications about motives people may have which cause them to leave the organization voluntarily. Using the Steers and Mowday (1981) model of turnover, research questions were compiled. Results were that organizational characteristics, job expectations, and job performance were related to affective responses to job. Also non-work influences were not related to intent to stay or leave. “Non-work” influences were the following: state of the economy, alternative opportunities, and organizational determinants like size, pay, job satisfaction and commitment. Important findings were that employees with high levels of satisfaction and commitment were more likely to remain with the organization. This result is similar to the outcome of U.S. studies. More importantly was the idea that maquiladora workers considered education and training to be an important benefit. While this research did bring new insights about maquiladora turnover, many issues were left without discussion. For instance, work-family issues and more about incentives.

Barajas-Escamilla and Yalan (1995) investigated turnover exclusively women employed in maquiladoras and their reasons for leaving. While other investigators have stated reasons for turnover due to low salaries and inadequate working conditions as well as, searching for better employment, Barajas-Escamilla and Yalan (1995) see turnover as a result of the low living standards present in the worker’s livelihood. They cite lack of housing, water, sewage, lighting, high rent, and lack of transportation. They state that these factors create “instability” and prompt workers to migrate for better conditions and thus turnover results (p. 199). The authors reveal that of the women worker’s residences in Tijuana, only 48.2% had sewage services, 51.1 % had indoor restrooms, and 48.2% had indoor plumbing. In addition, in their investigation they did mention firms’ attempts to minimize turnover by applying inducements in the form of higher salaries, bonuses, attendance prizes, recognition systems, and living quarters. Nevertheless, according to their analysis, despite the increase of inducements, turnover still existed in high numbers. They attributed this phenomenon to the firms’ lack of knowledge concerning worker’s needs.

Kavanaugh (1997) investigated one particular maquiladora and the variables that promote the retention of Mexican professional employees. After interviewing 14 Mexican professionals (managers, supervisors, and engineers), Kavanaugh’s (1997) findings were the following: health, safety, cleanliness, and comfort of the plant; friendly working environment (camaraderie); freedom (controlling their own work); and the extra things this particular maquiladora provides. Interviewees mentioned that this particular maquiladora provides “extra things not required by law” (Kavanaugh, 1997, p. 183). Some “extras” mentioned were awarding scholarships to employees and their families, employing family members of present employees, listening to employees when problems arise, recognizing employees for initiatives presented, and allowing for completion of graduate degrees. This particular maquiladora also provided a new cafeteria and clean working conditions as well as, conducted award ceremonies as “personal” as possible (Kavanaugh, 1997).

In addition, Kavanaugh (1997) also mentioned factors that reduced employee commitment. Based on unstructured interviews, the following factors resulted: lack of planning and excess workload, lack of career development, discrimination, unfair promotion methods (using politics and impression management), and managerial focus inconsistencies between Mexican managers and supervisors. Finally, Kavanaugh (1997) revealed factors that lead to both retention and turnover: quality, training, and salary and benefits. He stated that despite the maquiladora’s emphasis in quality, strenuous training, and competitive salary and benefits; these are the reasons employees are leaving. After completion of quality programs and training, these employees become “attractive” to other maquiladoras and are
lured away by their inability to “resist the very lucrative opportunities that they are offered” (Kavanaugh, 1997, p. 227). While the mentioning of inducements took place, further investigation did not. However, this study did warrant the need to probe further into this stream of research; in particular, in examining other levels of maquiladora employees.

Presley (1997) conducted interviews with four maquiladora managers investigating perceptions managers have of workers, including employee reasons for leaving and methods of inducements to promote retention. Managers mentioned that employees mainly leave due to family-related reasons. An example was given that one man quit because he was assisting his brother on arranging a wedding. In retaining employees, managers that used individual incentives had lower turnover rates than managers that used team rewards. In addition, the facility with the lowest turnover, used not only monetary bonuses to reward above-average employees, but also gave individual recognition like posting the employee’s picture on a bulletin board.

Pelled and Hill (1997b) found that participative management in maquiladoras was associated with increased performance and also lower turnover. They claimed that participative management, which can be a form of inducement, is “insensitive” to cultural differences and likely to have a positive effect in Mexico. Even realizing the relatively high power distance in this country, Pelled and Hill (1997b) still found that participative management will be successful after receiving surveys from upper managers. They failed to go to the source… the lower and mid-level workers who will be subjects to this inducement. On the other hand, Pelled and Hill (1997a) conducted another study going directly to the source, the workers in determining the values that can play a role in the attachment of an organization. The research idea was worthy, but again, they used values developed from U.S. studies and subjects. They also mentioned the sample was production workers and that questionnaires were given. Widely-known is the fact that lower-level workers have little to no education and since questions were directly taken from U.S. scales, the possibility exists of inconsistencies, mistranslation issues; as well as not being as literate as needed. Interestingly, they recommend qualitative research to validate results.

Interviewing 148 women who had quit working in the maquiladoras, Guendelman, Samuel, and Ramirez (1998), reported the following as reasons for quitting: personal non-occupational illness, vital events such as pregnancy and marriage, family obligations such as child care, leaving town to care for a sick family member, and partner opposition to work. From these results, it seems that non-work factors (or work-family conflict) played a major role in quitting work in the maquiladora. In addition, if inducements had been introduced like a child-care center, medical assistance programs, maternity leave, and family activities, there would be a possibility of minimizing the turnover problem in these particular cases.

Based on Mexico literature, Maertz (1999) investigated the possible linking of background characteristics to voluntary turnover. He examined work-family conflict, likelihood of migrant border shock, and identification with an unstable work group as well as demographic variables like education, age, and marital status. The results were that living with parents and number of maquiladoras worked in previously “significantly contributed” to predicting turnover among Mexican workers (Maertz, 1999, p. 112).

In a recent study Pena, (2000) pointed out that maquiladora employees cannot be discussed as one homogeneous group with high turnover rates. She found in her study that skilled universal operators were employed more than 24 months, unskilled line operators, 9.7 months, skilled technicians and line managers, 7.6 months, unskilled support staff, greater than 24 months, professional executives, 4.5 months and skilled supervisors, greater than 24 months. Pena (2000) also investigated the industry type and found that the automobile plant by far showed greater employee stability when compared to chemical (1), electronics (2), and textile plants (2). Pena (2000); however, briefly mentioned reasons dissatisfied workers were quitting, like long working hours and low wages.

Miller et al., (2001) were the first to examine if maquiladora “perks and benefits” reduce turnover. Their focus; however, was limited to the inducement of compensation. They found no support for higher fixed pay, seniority and attendance bonuses, vacation days, meal subsidies, and aquinaldo as deterrents to lower turnover. They did find support for productivity bonuses and profit sharing. The major concern with this study is that organizational data was gathered instead of individual perspectives. In addition, general managers of 115 maquiladoras supplied the statistics used in testing hypotheses. Social desirability as well as other bias may have occurred.
Maertz, Stevens, and Campion (2003) did develop a turnover model for explaining the causes of Mexican employees in maquiladoras in Mexico. They did include important antecedents that were not incorporated in earlier turnover models, for instance, non-work roles, co-worker and supervisor attachment, “reciprocal obligations,” and group interactions (Maertz, et al., 2003). Interviewing 47 employees, the researchers analyzed workers’ attitudes and feelings in order to better comprehend factors that influence turnover intentions.

An interesting finding is the result of 31 responses stating “family members” as the entity that they are most loyal to compared to 10 “friends and neighbors,” 10 “their work,” and 7 “supervisor or group leader”. In responding to the questions of organizational attachment; 10 responses were “I must make a living somewhere,” and “Like the job/Easy work”. Nine responses were “Plant close to home” and 8 responses were “Good relations with coworkers” and “Don’t want to search for another job”. Considering that work-family issues have minimally been mentioned in the turnover literature, it seems to play a major influence in the Mexican culture. While Maertz, et al (2003) did mention moderating variables like adequate compensation, flexibility for non-work roles, development opportunities, harmonious environment, and non-aversive work in their model; they were incorrectly classified as “values”.

Values are basic beliefs a person has about what is “right and wrong,” as well as initiate a certain attitude followed by a behavior based entirely on how he or she feels about the particular value (Adler, 1997, 2002). While one’s values may change over time, they do tend to remain deeply ingrained in one’s personality. An example by Adler (1997) mentions “loyalty to the family” as a value that prompts Latin American managers to employ family members in their place of business when feasible. A better definition to the Maertz et al (2003) variables would be job characteristics. The stated “values” are forms of benefits or job characteristics that when “enhanced” may be classified as inducements (Rynes & Barber, 1990).

**ATTRACTION IN MAQUILADORAS**

Due to high levels of turnover in maquiladoras, academic literature on methods of attracting potential employees has virtually been non-existent. There has been practitioner literature on the subject during the time when maquiladora growth rates were increasing. However, the majority of the articles looked at methods in attracting upper-level or technical employees (Forbes, 1997; Noecker, 1997, 1998; Sunoo, 2000) not lower-level assembly-line workers.

In summarizing this section, turnover studies in maquiladoras are growing due to their importance in the Mexican economy. However, studies conducted have mainly involved interviews with upper level managers and HR managers. In addition, many of the empirical studies fell prey to simply translating questionnaires, thus totally implicating U.S. based responses to another culture. Nevertheless, the research does bring some insight in the area of inducements and their probability of success in maquiladoras. The maquiladoras that are skillful at effectively utilizing inducements in their attraction and retention strategies will have a significant competitive advantage. In order for maquiladoras to receive these outcomes of attracting potential employees and reducing turnover, focus needs to be on the workers. We know that people differ in their needs and this is meaningful in attempting to explain behavior in organizations. In addition we know that investigating behavior in a different country merits considerable attention due to minimal studies in this area. Despite this barrier, the differences in a culture’s laws, norms, attitudes, skills, values, and motives, provides a basis for expecting differences between workers’ needs in different societies.

Considering the historically high number of turnover in the lower-levels in border maquiladoras it was not necessary to determine why the workers were leaving but what an organization can do to prevent them from leaving. In addition, research has shown that the attraction of potential applicants is as important to eventually retaining them. With this in mind, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with seventy-five lower-level maquiladora workers to determine what “attracts” workers to one maquiladora over another and also what is necessary to “retain” them in their current maquiladora.
RESEARCH DESIGN

Method
The research consisted of an in-depth exploration of lower-level workers needs. While many needs investigations have taken place, all have been conducted using survey instruments developed and validated by U.S. researchers and subjects. Since this investigation focuses on lower-level workers in a developing country, a qualitative field study was conducted in order to best capture significant variables relevant to the needs of this group of maquiladora workers. Field studies allow for the discovering of relations and interactions among psychological variables in real social structures (Kerlinger, 1992). Due to proximity to the university, field studies were conducted in a total of five maquiladoras, three in Reynosa and two in Matamoros, Tamaulipas. To fully understand maquiladora workers, in-depth personal interviews were conducted with 75 lower-level workers. The personal qualitative interview offers the best method to gather information to discover employee’s reasons for doing or believing something (Kerlinger, 1992; Patton, 2002). The personal interview is valuable due to the large amount of rich information that can be received.

Data Collection Techniques
As termed by Patton (2002, p. 343), open-ended questions via an “interview guide” was used. The questions merely served as a “guide” in that the researcher was free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will reveal the subject of interest that of the needs of the workers. The researcher remained “free to build a conversation, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style” but with the focus on the predetermined subject that of the discovery of the underlying needs of the maquiladora workers (Patton, 2002, p. 343). In addition by combining several interview approaches, informal conversational and interview guide, questions about new areas of inquiry that were not originally anticipated in the interview instrument’s development were asked. The qualitative interview served as the best method by offering the workers being interviewed the opportunity to respond in their own words and to express their own personal perspective of their experiences in working in a maquiladora.

While the bulk of the maquiladora worker literature entails investigations of managers, expatriates, engineers, or technicians, this study will contribute to the established literature by only interviewing lower-level assembly-line workers. In addition, according to INEGI (2007a), based on recent February 2005 figures, 953,000 (80%) of the 1,191,250 Mexican maquiladora employees are production or assembly-line workers. Specifically, in Reynosa, 77.7% of the 66,091 maquiladora workers are production or assembly line workers (INEGI, 2007). Also, Matamoros posts similar figures of 82.8% of the 66,023 maquiladora workers being production or assembly line workers (INEGI, 2007).

RESULTS

Attraction in The Maquiladoras
Due to historically high number of workers leaving maquiladoras it was important to discover what “attracts” workers to certain maquiladoras. The interviews clearly indicated that there is no “attraction” present. Their high “need for basic necessities” does not allow for selective practices when looking for a job. Many of the interviewees along with their friends and family came from other parts of the country and acquiring a maquiladora job became their most important objective. While they would have preferred to work alongside friends and family, most of the time that was not possible. Thus, time being of the essence and rather than wait for an opening where a relative or friend worked in, they would seek work elsewhere, anywhere.

Therefore, even if the particular plant was considered “attractive,” unemployed individuals overlooked the attractiveness in order to secure a job whether it be in that particular maquiladora or another. In regard to maquiladora management, using the inducements as “attractive” methods are unnecessary and not successful. Many workers mentioned some “attractive” details (i.e. nice supervisors, high amount of bonuses, higher pay) about previous plants they or friends worked in but if these plants are not hiring, they will settle for any job. Even workers aware of “higher-paying” plants may not risk leaving due to their seniority and uncertainties involved in moving to another maquiladora.
These interviews revealed that a maquiladora’s reputation is developed by “word-of-mouth” of current and previous workers and disseminated throughout the maquiladoras. Some are known as “good paying but hard work,” “girls work,” and “low pay, but easy work.” All plants are judged by their pay and work levels. Conversations entailed workers regretting to “learn more” about the plant prior to beginning work since all they are concerned about is finding the opportunity to work and earn a living. If any recommendations are to be given to plant management concerning the recruitment of workers, the following would apply.

1. Make sure the applicant is well aware of what is manufactured in the plant. In addition, let them know if they will be standing or sitting. There were several male workers that expressed that if they would have known prior that the job entailed sewing they would not have accepted the job.

2. Similar to #1, is the idea of relaying a realistic job preview to the applicants. Make sure applicants are aware of the different shifts, overtime requirements, and hours per shift. Yes, potential applicants are in desperate need of a job; however, they do have other responsibilities (i.e. children) and arrangements to be concerned with.

3. Make sure applicants know the amount of pay before bonuses (i.e. transportation, attendance, food coupons) and benefits are included. Several cases mentioned that the plant gave them inaccurate information regarding the pay.

4. Finally, make sure applicants understand what is being told to them. Many recently hired workers spoke of initial “trainings” that were not clear and not all information was heard or understood. Many of the workers in this particular level in the maquiladoras have little to no education and require a more basic overview suitable to their level. As seen in this sample of workers, education levels ranged from elementary school to high school equivalent and thus their range of understanding is very different.

Retention in The Maquiladoras

The actual conversations with the workers carry much significance in beginning to explain workers intention to stay in the organization. As stated in the previous section, maquiladora management should not focus mainly on “recruiting” and “attracting” potential applicants. Their focus should lie in the “retention” of their current employees. Throughout the interviews with workers, many suggestions were made to improve this very significant factor. On the other side, the talks I had with plant managers, echoed similar desires in minimizing turnover. If both sides want the same thing, why is it not happening? Why do workers continue to leave maquiladoras? Based on the interviews and findings of this dissertation, recommendations for management are the following.

1. Money as a motivator. As much as Herzberg et al., (1959) does not want to accept this belief, for lower-level maquiladora workers, money definitely is a motivator. However, do not just increase pay levels, workers want to “earn” their pay and like the idea that money is given based on higher work productivity. Many workers stated that there was no incentive to work at higher levels if everyone earns the same regardless of their work effort. Many workers introduced this concept that both sides will win. Since workers want more pay, and management wants more production, reward individual workers that put more effort and produce at higher levels. In certain maquiladoras, this idea was expressed but also mentioned as “impossible” due to the inability to distinguish among “individual production.” In this case, team rewards may be appropriate.

2. Training for supervisors. How difficult can it be to manage lower-level workers? It is apparent that this act is under-rated and taken for granted. The interviews were filled with comments regarding the unprofessional actions by supervisors. As stated throughout this dissertation, the expectations on the supervisor is “more than expected” and supervisors need to be prepared for this responsibility. Themes surrounding favoritism, inequality, harassment, profanity, undue pressure and stress, and yelling were very common in the workplaces. These workers are people, and should be treated with respect, not animals, like many mentioned they felt like.

3. Promotion from within. For many workers, their work careers will begin and end in a maquiladora. Their aspirations lie in learning everything they can about the plant and to someday surface above the “sindicato” (operator) rank to the prestigious rank of “confianza” (position of trust/management). Like mentioned in
previous sections, the underlying motivator is to earn more money. Nevertheless, many workers commented
on the pleasure they felt when a higher-level position would open and a fellow operator would receive the
job. Many workers, while disappointed that they did not receive the job, they seemed pleased to hear that
they were hiring from “their own.” This action by management is a motivator and leaves the possibility that
one day, another operator will rise above the “sindicato” ranks. On the other hand, displeasure was
obviously shown when certain maquiladoras would hire someone from the “outside” at a much higher salary
and not know anything about the plant or how things are done. There was a particular instance when a
“new” technician was hired and he was asking the operators how to do a particular task. The workers
desired a type of program that allowed operators to descend into higher positions through “hands-on”
training and classes. Many workers echoed their sentiments that a “career-plan” for operators was necessary
and a motivator to stay in the plant since there was something to work forward to.

4. Consistent rules and procedures. This recommendation would apply also to #2, since supervisors enforce
most of the rules. However, there has to be consistency among the supervisors, HR department, and group
leaders. Rules on deduction of pay, absentee excuses, tolerance violations, cafeteria rules, overtime
schedules, shift changes, education reimbursements, amount of bonuses, and break times have to be clear
and specific so that everyone will be aware of them. During the interviews, different workers working in the
same plant, mentioned specific “rules” differently, like in the amount of attendance bonuses and food
coupons, and whether they had a tolerance level or not. These basic inquiries have to be understood and
applied to all so that there will be no “favoritism” in the eyes of the workers.

5. Recognition and appreciation. As mentioned in #1, money is a motivator; however, the act of recognizing
and appreciating of employees is a must. Workers claimed that they only heard from the supervisors when
they were performing at a lower level. They never heard from the supervisors when they were doing a good
job. This sentiment was heard throughout the maquiladoras that a gesture of appreciation was necessary.
For many maquiladoras, the economy really affected their ability to show their appreciation to their workers.
Where there used to be monthly and annual celebrations, there were none due to monetary constraints. For
the workers, they look forward for these gatherings and feel unappreciated when other plants who are also in
an economic crisis still manages to have at least cake and coke for its employees in celebrating the plant’s
anniversary. As small as it could be, the act of appreciation must continue.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations are based entirely on the interviews of the workers. No previous research was used. Prior
to this recent knowledge, many suggestions to “attract” and “retain” maquiladora workers came from the managers or
via surveys given to workers that resulted in inaccuracies. The most significant feature of this article was the actual
conversations with the workers themselves. Their feelings, opinions, and beliefs regarding attraction and retention
issues in maquiladoras were openly expressed and used to derive the given recommendations.

REFERENCES

Mexico: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, pgs.189-214.

